DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 371 048 UD 029 423

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TITLE Chart[er]ing Urban School Reform: Philadelphia Style. Draft.
PUB DATE 17 Jul 92
NOTE 47p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Disadvantaged Youth; *Economically Disadvantaged; Educational Assessment; Educational Change; Governance; High Risk Students; *High Schools; Neighborhood Schools; *Outcomes of Education; Parent Participation; Participative Decision Making; School Districts; *School Restructuring; Secondary Education; Teacher Role; *Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS Charter Schools; Philadelphia School District PA; *Philadelphia Schools Collaborative PA; *Reform Efforts; Teacher Engagement

ABSTRACT

This essay describes charter school development and the 3-year Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) Schools Collaborative, which worked with educators and parents to transform comprehensive high schools, increase student outcomes, and establish teacher engagement and parental involvement. Charter schools (intellectual and emotional communities of adults, students, teachers, parents, counselors, and university faculty that nurture an engaging educational experience across 4 years and enjoy ongoing relationships inside urban public high schools) were designed. Neighborhood high schools and the Central District were radically reformed via communication and decision making governance, school organization, professional development, student and family supports, assessment/evaluation, and partnerships/focus on transitions. Eight million dollars and 3 years later, the first phase of the Collaborative shows that school-based restructuring (a relentlessly supported strategic agenda focusing on transformed governance, instruction, structure, assessment, and student supports) improves student outcomes even in poverty-ridden districts; external investment enhances student outcomes, especially monies instigating systemic change; participatory and strategically guided decision making lead to improved student outcomes; schools most "at risk" are most susceptible to early improvements, especially with high external and deep school-based investment; and educationally rich and intimate learning communities enhance student learning, teacher collaboration, and parent involvement. (Contains 20 references.) (RLC)

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**DRAFT**
**July 17, 1992**

# Chart[er]ing Urban School Reform: Philadelphia Style

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This is the story of the first three years of high school reform; a story of reform in the midst. Our focus, in Philadelphia, has been on the comprehensive high schools, those schools which as in virtually all urban centers sit at the bottom of a deeply stratified urban layering of secondary schools, where 80% of the city's students are assigned, disproportionately those who are low income, overage, African American and Latino, and those who import depressing academic biographies. While by most definitions, these students would be called "at risk", our intent is to demonstrate that both notions of *educational risk* and *educational resilience*, reside more in the contexts of schooling than in the bodies of those students saddled with labels. Our strategy for reform has been dual: to fundamentally rethink and restructure the neighborhood high schools and to radically reform the Central District.

This essay will examine closely how the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative, a not for profit 501(c)(3), has worked at the interior of schools, with educators and parents, to transform existing schools in ways which have, remarkably, begin to produce increases in student outcomes, and which reflect evidence of substantial teacher engagement and parental involvement. This essay



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will then review briefly the central district issues that are now percolating up from the schools, as they pursue transformation. The radical transformation of urban Central Districts (and of state financing formulas) is, of course, the next critical essay that needs to be rewritten - nationally.

**The Context of Restructuring**

In 1988, the School District of Philadelphia began discussions with The Pew Charitable Trusts Foundation for what would ultimately be an $8.3 million grant to support the restructuring of the comprehensive high schools in Philadelphia. When the grant came to fruition, the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative was carved out as a 501(c)(3), sitting in the space both inside and outside the District, working closely and collaboratively with the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers.

The task of the Collaborative was to enable educators and parents to "restructure" the governance, structures, instruction, parent and community relations, assessment practices and transitions into and out of their neighborhood high school. The Collaborative became a forum, bringing together educators, parents, university and corporate representatives, the central district and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, to discuss, imagine and create educational communities for urban adolescents. With a small staff, and substantial resources, the Collaborative could provoke, and respond to, conversations about what is and what could be. Over the past three years we have been engaged in this work, pressing issues at the District, Union, school and "charter" (school within a school) levels. The question driving the work of the Collaborative was not, how do we create alternative schools for urban youth? nor how do we provoke shared decision

making and school based management for urban schools? Surrounded by a state-wide movement for voucher legislation, we pursued the big systemic, educational question --how do we transform a system of deeply troubled high schools, into many small, educationally and emotionally rich communities of learners with existing teachers, in existing schools, for existing students, and in existing communities, long abandoned by the federal, state and local governments? The task was ambitious.

In Philadelphia the work of reform has been premised on the radical rethinking of "what's a school," the dramatic investment in critical, transformative conversations among teachers and parents, and the belief that reform is successful only if student outcomes are ultimately affected. While the improvement of labor conditions for teachers, and the engagement of parents at school were central to our strategy, the task was to reinvent urban, public high schools for students at and near risk, to be educational and democratic communities engaged in ongoing public conversations about "what could be."

Within the high schools, over the past three years, this restructuring work has developed through six, critical and interdependent streams of analysis and practice.

1. Governance: Communication and Decision-Making Within these high schools decision making is now organized around principles of shared decision making/school based management (SD/SBM). The first task of the shared governance is the development of an educational plan for the school with provisions for charter development. The second task is development of a shared governance plan to support Charters. Charters should also be organized internally through shared decision-making.

2. In restructuring high schools, the School Organization is being

dramatically transformed into educational communities called Charters (school within a school). The primary intellectual and student support work of secondary education occurs within charters.

3. **Professional Development: Curriculum and Leadership Development** Teachers are granted time, space and images to pursue Charter based professional development so that curricular and instructional strategies can engage students in active, multi-cultural collaborative, and in some instances accelerated learning.

4. **Community: Student and Family Supports:** The relationship between school and community is transforming, both school wide and within each Charter, into a more enriched partnership. Clear attention is focussed on parental involvement, access to community based services for adolescents in the school, relations with employers and sites for community service implemented as part of the curriculum of Charter Schools.

5. **Assessment/Evaluation** Student assessment strategies include some standardized testing but serious investment in portfolio, exhibition and/or other performance based assessment strategies. Each SD/SBM school is provided a detailed, quantitative data base for tracking student progress within and across Charter Schools, and support for performance based graduation projects.

6. **Partnerships/Focus on Transitions** Charters are becoming the locus for school based partnerships with universities, social service agencies, and employers. All partnerships with comprehensive high schools, to the extent possible are connected to the needs of Charters, and many are directed at facilitating transitions into ninth grade, and /or transitions out of high school into college and/or employment.

Within this framework of restructuring, a fair amount has been accomplished over the last three years (see Table 1).

In order to understand how these six elements of restructuring permeate and transform daily classroom life, we telescope in on life inside Charters - the small, academic and emotional communities designed by and for teachers, students and parents, within restructuring high schools.

**The Story of Charters: Rejecting "At Risk" and Inventing "Communities of Learners"**

Three years ago, the work of the Collaborative was first begun. Through a series of conversations, urban high school teachers helped Jan Somerville, Executive Director of the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative and me, as senior consultant, imagine "what could be" the ideal educational experience in a comprehensive high school. In meeting rooms and in Jan's living room, after food and wine, we invented, together, images of small, intimate and intellectually rich communities in which faculty would work closely and over time with each other and a stable group of students. These teachers cherished the idea of working within interdisciplinary teams, and with an ongoing cohort of students. They bristled, however, at the idea of creating these communities in "your existing schools, with your present colleagues." They shuddered when we noted that Charters (schools within a school) would begin in the ninth grade. One teacher gasped, "Ninth graders! They're all hormones and feet!"

Today, throughout the 22 public, comprehensive high schools in Philadelphia, 81 charters now exist, grades 9 - 12. All 22 comprehensive high schools have developed, at minimum, two charters a piece. Six schools are committed to fully charter. In these schools, all students and all faculty belong to one of these communities. A full half of the charters have been "home grown ," developed by interdisciplinary groups of teachers, over the past three years as the critical site for high school restructuring in Philadelphia. Charters are present day versions of what we used to call "schools within a school," but they have quite specific criteria.

The idea is that full schools be "charterized." Two to four hundred students constitute a charter, with ten to twelve core teachers who work together from 9th (or 10th grades) through to graduation. The charter faculty enjoy a common preparation period daily, share responsibility for a cohort of students, and invent curriculum, pedagogies and assessment strategies that reflect a commitment to a common intellectual project. Students travel together to classes, and across their four years in high school. With teachers, counselors and parents they constitute a semi-autonomous community within a building of charters. Charters result in diplomas, prepare all students toward college and/or employment, and the student body must be, by definition, heterogeneous.

Charters are not "programs" that meet once a week. They are not "transitional projects" for 9th graders or students in trouble. They are not pull out remediation or advancement for students in special need "with special gifts." They can not include only a common set of students, but must have a common set of faculty who work together. No one school within a school should exist with a traditional high school (or it will be eaten - as we all know from experience). And charters should not be tracks. They should, instead, work like intellectual and emotional communities of adults and students, teachers and parents, counselors and university faculty, who nurture together an engaging educational experience across four years and enjoy the richness of deep, sustained and ongoing relationships, within and across generations, inside an urban, public high school. This is the vision.

The point of restructuring was to engage existing comprehensive high schools in the task of full school transformation. That is, all teachers, staff and

students, as well as parents, it was felt, needed to feel attached to and be engaged with academic communities from 9th grade through 12th. These communities would be their Charters. And these Charters would be what makes the difference between "students at risk" and "educational communities of resilience." As one teacher explained -

More middle class kids have the support and community and networks.
These kids need it -- and the Charter delivers just that.
A safe community in which they can learn, experiment and be nurtured.

We have learned quickly the depths of "communitarian damage" in these schools, and the work it would require to heal emotionally, and engage intellectually. The damage of working and dreaming in a deeply hierarchical bureaucracy shows in a diminished sense of possibility for community voiced by teachers. Nevertheless, at the core of restructuring lay both aims -- to create relationally rich Charters that care for the emotional and social needs and wants of students, and also to engage the intellects and passions of educators and students. The combination is essential. The point was not, simply (or naively) to "increase self esteem" or hug more, but to work with the long neglected minds and meanings of these students. It meant taking teachers and students seriously as intellectuals. Most of our resources have been invested in "resuscitating" the sense of possibility held by teachers, strengthening their discipline-based work, and facilitating intellectually rich interdisciplinary work.

It was a chance, for some teachers, of a life time. "This is why I entered education in the first place." It was an assault on autonomy for others. "Create community with my colleagues, and these students? Have you met my colleagues,

have you seen these students?" The work has been amazing.

**Charters in Context**

Both within Philadelphia (Academies, Cities-In-Schools, Motivation) and beyond (Foley and Crull; Wolf; Oxley; Meier) we now have good evidence that small educational communities, Charters, can enhance academic and social outcomes for students, including "holding power," attendance, achievement, promotion, sense of engagement, democratic participation and parental involvement (see also Wehlage, 1988). This is particularly true for low income, "low achieving" students whose needs exceed most students', whose desire for relational attachment runs high, and for whom dropping out bears disproportionate economic and social consequence (Fine, 1992). Charters have become:

- small communities which engage intellectual work, personal belonging, and continuity for high school students;•
- the context for professional development, shared decision making and interdisciplinary curriculum development for teachers;
- the site for braiding the academic and "social" needs of students and for reconceptualizing issues of student behavior, such as attendance and discipline "problems"; and
- comforting centers for parental involvement.

Charters are places where "risk" can transform into "resilience" in a community.

The educational research which bears most directly on academic life inside Charters comes from Diana Oxley's 1990 study of "weak" vs. "well designed" secondary school houses in New York City. Oxley writes:

The in-depth analysis of New York City house systems [like Charters] and review of the literature indicate the following features are critical to the success of house plans.

- Schools are organized into house units with no more than 500 students and a core teaching staff which instructs most, if not

all, students' courses throughout their stay in school.

- Houses are divided into subunits containing an interdisciplinary teacher team and enough students to allow team members to instruct their required classload within the subunit.

- Student support staff are attached to each house, work exclusively with house students and collaboratively with each other and instructional teams.

- Extracurricular activities are organized within each house to give students more opportunities to participate in school life and to develop valuable skills not ordinarily pursued in the classroom.

- House classes, activities, and staff offices are physically located in adjacent rooms within the school building.

- Houses operate in a semi-autonomous fashion with the capacity to determine house policy, select staff, allocate resources, and discipline students.

Quantitative analyses compared small and large schools with weak house designs to small and large schools with strong designs on both direct and indirect effects predicted on the basis of theory. Findings indicated that house systems or houses with the more complete designs had more positive effects on staff and students than others. Well designed houses irrespective of school size outperformed weak ones in large schools on most measures, including students' relationships with peers, teachers, and support staff, extracurricular participation, sense of community, academic performance, and teachers' knowledge of students' all around performance. Well designed houses performed as well as the weakly designed house system of the small school on most measures and better than the small school with respect to sense of community and teachers' knowledge of student performance. (Oxley, 1990, ii)

As with the Oxley data, our initial evidence from Charters we would consider "well designed" are very encouraging. Students, even those who began high school "at risk" (e.g. low achieving and unmotivated), do improve, in the

aggregate, in terms of "survival", attendance, grades and level of credit accumulation relative to their non-Charter peers. Charter students' attendance seems to be up, as are their course passage and promotion rates. We expect, with early encouragement, that graduation and college going rates will also be enhanced after four years of Charter life.

As with the students, and deeply related, teachers' sense of themselves as intellectuals and professionals within Charters has been enhanced. From many educators we hear delight. Listen to Marsha Pincus, an English teacher in Crossroads:

> Finally I can teach students in ways that allow me to engage with them, and other faculty, and hold onto them for their entire secondary school experience.

Some request help. Earline Wright, a history teacher, noted two years ago,

> OK Michelle, you told me you wanted me to get to know these kids. Now we do. And we know what is going on with them. The kid who used to flash the lights on and off in the back of the room isn't just a disciplinary problem, he's a young man with a crack addicted mother, or he is homeless. These students have hard lives. Other than taking them home, I don't know what to do with them. You need to get me some help. [Earline works within Video house, designed for low income, low achieving Chapter I, overage students at Olney High School.]

This was the start of our work with social work interns collaborating in classrooms with teachers in Charters.

Some teachers admit that their involvement in Charters has provoked a sharp shift in their perspective on students. Anne Bourgeois, math teacher and

Philadelphia Federation of Teachers Building Representative for her High School, works in a Charter, a writing intensive, project based Charter which has allied with the Essential Schools movement. At a conference for charter educators, Anne spoke passionately to a citywide group of faculty, about how teaching in a Charter has transformed her views of herself as teacher, and her views of students as learners:

> I always thought of myself as a good teacher; but not always so creative. I have never enjoyed teaching as much as I do now. I am learning from my colleagues in the Charter and, the most amazing thing, I never thought my students wanted to see themselves as students! We would all give the class away to the most disruptive students. Now the students tell Charlie to "shut up, and let us learn."

We can now appreciate how hierarchical, disempowering bureaucracies can keep teachers from seeing/hearing students' voices, and from working with colleagues on "what could be" (Fine, 1989). Indeed, with these structural changes, teachers have radicalized over three years in their demands. Those most engaged in Charter life now say "Allow us to work over time, as an educational community, with this group of students, parents and with each other." For them that translates into:

> don't bounce teachers out of the Charter because the school has a momentary drop in enrollment, and don't appoint the next most senior person on the list to our Charter Teachers need individual and collective stability, we need time during the day to plan, reflect and build curriculum, and we need to interview our peers to assure that they know, and we know, how we can live together as a community (composite comments, 1992).

These issues would be central to the making of any community, but they

have been, until now, considered almost impossible to raise, much less resolve in a bureaucratic urban school district. Working as a team of teachers on the issues of organizational change, curriculum development and instructional strategies, many charter based teachers now report feeling "reinvigorated", if [as above] they are frustrated by constraints within their schools, and imposed by larger district policies and practices. Because our focus on teacher/parent development has been so relentless and school based, teachers are already seeing differences in themselves and their students.

> You finally have a chance to teach what makes sense to the kids and to who you are as teachers. Not just interdisciplinarily "makes sense," but philosophically knowing why you're teaching what you're teaching. [Liz Woods, Furness]

From these Charter faculty we note that teachers who have taught together, typically alienated for 20-30 years, are now providing each other support and recognition for engagement, experimentation, and for their contributions to improved student outcomes.

One charter leader explained how charters foster teachers' growth:

> Our idea was creating a safe place, an atmosphere of acceptance. There's no anonymity in a charter -- that's why insecure teachers avoid them. Vulnerabilities hang out. That's where the charter is good because then vulnerabilities are accepted and teachers start developing strengths to start overcoming those vulnerabilities. In dealing with students holistically, as we can in the charter, we are dealing with teachers holistically as well. [Essie Abrahams, Lincoln]

Another teacher saw the same opportunity within a charter:

> You see someone with a rigid teaching style who's not yet open to a variety of kids' learning styles. But there's room for repair

through collaboration. [Shirley Farmer, Kensington]

Simply stated, Charters have become a compelling vehicle through which a sense of connection among teachers, students and parents, has evolved. As one teacher explains:

> When we meet as a team and talk about students we can brainstorm on how to handle problems. It makes a great deal of difference when I can say to that student, "Well your other teachers said this about you." We're working as a team and the students know that.
>
> I'm more aware of who their other teachers are and what they're doing. I tell students to watch how their teachers teach. That can help students study. . .
>
> Those meetings are really valuable. We discuss what we can do for students. . .
>
> It's better for individual teachers because they're not the only viewpoint on a student or class. They get ideas on how to handle a class because everyone has the same group.
> [Gail Eisgrau, Edison SMART charter]

Parents of high school students, who have been the group the most recently folded into restructuring work in Philadelphia, now comment that their relationships with schools have deepened because their involvement with Charters allow them in not for a discipline problem, truancy or a special education referral, but as members of the charter community. Sarah Gilliam, mother of two boys, one of whom attends a Charter, told me:

> When he was first in the Charter, I thought "Something new again." But then I saw him flourish, and the teachers took such an interest in him. And in me. They called me,

> and we worked together. The charter has give me something to connect to. Through it I became interested in the school and really, that was part of why I was willing to serve on the governance council at Olney High School. I feel like it is my school, now, too.

Based on preliminary evidence, parental involvement seems to be increasing, over time, in quantity and deepening in quality through the Charter School experience.

It is hard to recognize how radically different "life in the charters" is from typical "life in a comprehensive high school" pre-charter days. So below I try to unravel the differences. . .

Before Charters, most students in these high schools had six classes a year, were heavily tracked, with different students in most of their classes, different teachers every year, and they belonged, emotionally, to no unit. Anonymity prevailed, and 45-55% of the typical 9th grade class ever made it to 10th grade - much less graduation.

Teachers, likewise, were locked in an anonymous maze. They taught 165-180 students in a day, sharing them, as a group, with no one. Cut rates, discipline problems, truancy were extreme. Discipline and counseling responsibilities were separated from teachers' work. Classroom educators enjoyed what some called autonomy, had, by all accounts no power, and suffered what others called isolation. They rarely talked with colleagues at their school about their classroom work, and were typically blamed for school failure.

> It was "Do your own thing" before charters. Teachers rarely shared their strategies and programs. Meetings were all administrative, no pedagogy going on.
>
> In charters with colleagues, in department or

> interdisciplinary meetings, there's a lot more strategizing. There was no opportunity to talk to my colleagues before. There was no reason to talk to colleagues before. Teaching interdisciplinarily it's compulsory. I'm certainly learning from colleagues, and colleagues ask me for help. Last week a teacher who has never in 35 years of teaching broken his class into groups, did so. He's not [even] in a charter. [Zach Rubin, Lincoln]

Most knew little about the "personal" lives of students, and for many this was just fine. Those deeply committed to students could choose "a few a year whom I know I could really make a difference with." Counselors worked through the alphabet, dividing students, A through Z, by the sum total of counselors available. Parents were invited to school either because their child was in trouble, or because there was a large, school wide Parents Night, typically with terrible and embarrassing attendance.

Now within Charters. . .

Students still have six classes a year, but they may be two at a time, with deep concentration for 10 weeks, earning of two credits over the period of time; or they may be three per semester, or four "on site" at school and two "in the community" through employment and/or community service. They know the students and faculty with whom they share a Charter, because they have, indeed, an ongoing life (four years) together. In some charters, faculty have divided up all the students into "family groups" so that all students have one adult (maybe teacher, counselor, aide, janitor, etc) with whom the personal connection is deep, sustained and confidential over four years.

> Family groups are a forum for students to get the strength to help each other solve problems. They set the agenda. [Shirley Farmer, Kensington]

As Renee Cohen, Coordinator of the Trailblazers Charter, Franklin High School, describes:

> Now, they [her Charter students] chase me down the hall asking for help. They see me as their advocate, and they're ready to use me!

Teachers still have typically large urban loads, but they share their students over four years with their Charter colleagues. Common prep times are spent discussing curriculum, instruction and assessment issues; worrying about and delighting over individual students; planning Family Nights for "significant adults and children" in the lives of their students; strategizing for how to get Christina over the death of her father or Paul not to move down South with his grandmother or Mr. Rodriguez not to deprive Cantada from the Charter trip to visit a college. Natalie Hiller, chemistry teacher, makes vivid her Charter life: "It's put a smile on my lips and bags under my eyes."

Groups of Charter teachers, with administrators and parents, are now involved in school based policy making, and in year round ongoing seminars of their own design. Some are studying and inventing authentic assessments. Others are integrating vocational and academic work. Many are creating interdisciplinary curriculum, developing multi-cultural classrooms, infusing Technology into instruction, and sharing, with Charter teachers from across the city, a seminar on Teaching and Learning. Within Charters, as the following scene conveys, faculty are engaged in rich, critical conversations about the nature of learning and teaching in urban America.

MF notes: There was a Charter faculty meeting in _____. I had just been pulled aside by an administrator who was -- astonished? pleased? worried? A group of Charter students had just popped into her office raving positively about their charter, but negatively about one teacher. One student put it this way, "We are _____ students. We deserve good teaching." She enters the faculty meeting.

**Teacher/facilitator** for the day, opens the meeting discussing what he calls the Slings and Arrows of our Charter:

We've been accused of taking lab areas. They say, You people want everything. You take all the labs, you drive other kids out of your charter. This isn't true! A number of students who were having trouble in our charter lobbied to leave, we resisted, monitored closely. We brought in more children, and many of them 9th grade repeaters and overage students. We did two days of work on rostering. We need data on how we are not creaming. Every time we are successful we have to hear, from our colleagues, that we are stealing the "best" students!

They then move onto talk about the "language of the contract we have established with students." We need time to ask ourselves, have we lived up to our end of the contract? Especially around how we are assessing students' work?

The conversation about assessment heats up --Let's talk about projects in the students' folders --- how do we give humanities credit? If four projects, 80/85/88, three projects 74, 2 projects 65, only 1 50?

**Another teacher**: This is absurd! What are we doing? We are trying to change the system and conform to it at the same time!

**Bob**: This is emblematic of the system. Early failure means you never see progress. We need to set aside class time, and faculty time, to discuss portfolios and how we are going to assess student work within the contract we establish with them.

**Bob continues**: Let's end with something positive.

**Ann**: Kids are talking about the wonderful time in math!

**Other math teacher**: Kids are coming to math!

**Social Studies teacher**: Several kids caught onto problem solving today.

**Natalie**: In my class kids passed a hat for goggles for the one kid to get into the lab. They are really becoming a community.

**Bob**: I'm learning about their culture -- they are educating me.

**Marsha**: -- We are educating each other.

**Phil**: We have to advocate for these children with the administration. One boy in my class was told he can't graduate. I have been here for 20 years, and never heard of this. So we need to advocate for our kids!

Three teachers stop me at conferences to announce, "I'm back! I was burned out and now I'm revived in my charter." But, as might be expected, there are still many who resist, as one recently did to a citywide group of faculty:

It's no longer the principals, the administration that is making us work harder or more than we think we should. Now it's peer pressure. Those **damn enthusiastic teachers**, our peers, want us to do what they are willing to do. And I'm not willing, after all these years, to change my work!"

Another teacher responded,

Hey, watch what you say! I'm one of those **damn enthusiastic** teachers, and I finally feel free to teach how, with whom, and with the beliefs that I have always wanted to.

Debates flourish within and across schools. Any kind of change is problematic. Democratic change is frustrating, loud, but possible. Undoing old myths, like tracking, however, is a real piece of work.

Counselors at some schools, like nurses and other student support staff are redesigning their work to fit Charters, rather than serve alphabet fragments of a full school. For some, the shifts are already rewarding. One commented:

> It's great to work with a group of teachers, and a group of students who share an intellectual project together. But, its' a real shift. I'm used to L through Q in the alphabet.

Likewise, Liz Woods, teacher and coordinator FACETS, describes:

> Being in a charter, especially with the social work interns has changed all of my work. Students now know that teachers are pushing them around, and they won't stand for it. So I, and other teachers, are being advocates for students. I am so delighted to hear my principal say, "Academics have to drive the rosters, not rosters driving the academics." That's a major change. One more thing; with Charters, parents are really involved. We invite 22 parents in for a Family Night. 17 showed up.

Others worry that restructuring is designed to "take away" their jobs. As charters become the operative structure for schooling, indeed questions are being raised by educators about the need for many previously "essential," school-wide positions (eg. disciplinarian, college advisor, roster person. . . ) because so many of these functions are absorbed and transformed in Charters.

**Charters and Student Outcomes: The Litmus for Restructuring**

Charters are struggling to become learning communities which embody the very pieces of restructuring that we would consider essential to full school transformation: democratic governance, creation of small intellectual communities with school based, ongoing professional development, authentic assessment, deep parental involvement and long term relationships between faculty and students resulting in college and/or work placements. Of the 81, all are struggling to capture these layers of transformation. A few are exceptional. Most are mediocre. Many are struggling. None, however, is worse than the full, anonymous bureaucratic

school out of which it was designed.

When we tell the quantitative stories of student outcomes and restructuring, we look closely at three broad questions -- Is this combination of restructuring strategies associated with discernible differences in the academic lives of students? Is it fair to argue that the infusion of monies for the explicit purpose of school based transformation produces differences in student performance? Finally, when we look at academic life inside charters, do charters make a difference in student learnings? To each question we can now offer, with two years of data, a no longer timid Yes. (For formal evaluation, see Center for Assessment and Policy Development Final Report, 1992 and Richard Clark's Evaluation memo, 1992).

**The Overall Impact of Restructuring Over Time.** Over time, the impact of two years of restructuring on students grades 9 through 12, across comprehensive high schools, demonstrates steady incremental improvements in student outcomes. Table I displays substantial increases over time in percent of students passing major subjects, particularly for 9th and 10th graders, the grades that restructuring has most directly impacted. Course passage rates have been less effected we believe because more "partial passers" are staying in school."*

* Educators and parents are now developing performance based assessment projects and criteria, reviewed collaboratively with university faculty, to assess students' levels of intellectual growth over time in their high schools.

**The Impact of External Investment and Shared Decision Making/School Based Management.** Table 2 displays results which suggest that high investment for strategic restructuring can pay off; shared decision making can be associated with improved student outcomes, and, indeed, schools that started off in the worst academic shape ("low starting point schools") seem to generate the

most substantial initial increases in course passage and promotion rates.

**The Impact of Charters.** Charters are now numerous and complicated. There are still some schools in which charters look a lot like "tracks," and a few schools in which only two charters exist. Yet a growing number of charters are designed to be heterogeneously grouped, and by next September, many SD/SBM schools will be fully chartered. But before we dive into charter data, a methodological and indeed substantive note is in order. There remains, still, an uneven distribution of special education and repeating 9th graders who are rostered outside of charters. Beliefs in tracking, the need for homogeneity and categorical groupings are more deeply embedded in school than we anticipated. And so these conversations among educators continues. Charter to non-charter comparisons must always keep this caveat in mind.

When we review the charter data, we can see first a dreary story of public high schooling. We could leave the analysis here and opt for vouchers, but instead we press on noticing the moments of real possibility for change. Students in charters, for example, tend to out-achieve their non charter peers (although over-representation of repeaters among non-charters is a methodological confound). Further, we can see that selected comparisons of demographically comparable 9th graders (Table 3) within schools substantiate the positive impact of Charters. At E High School, 77% of ninth grade students in charters earned sufficient numbers of credits to move from 9th to 10th grade, whereas only 30% of non-charter ninth grade students were promoted. At F High School, we see that 59% of "charter" 9th graders were promoted, compared to 48% of "non charter" new 9th graders, and a full 41% of <u>all</u> (including repeaters) 9th graders not in charters. The same

distributions can be discerned within G, D and B.

While the overall story is still too depressing, the most telling comparisons occur within Schools F and D, where two charters have been established explicitly for overage, Chapter I ninth graders who are, by design, older and academically "behind" their peers. Here again we have an exception to the heterogeneity rule, because teachers were ultimately convincing that 17 year old ninth graders differed in academic needs than 14 year olds. For these young women and men, statistical comparison groups are available. We can see on Table 3 that at F the "Copernican Overage Students" fare much better than "all 9th graders not in charters." They show a 10 percentage point gain in attendance over last year, higher course passage rates than peers (particularly for math and science) and more of these students earned 4 or more credits than their "non-charter" peers. When we move to the D High School data, we see again that Chapter I students enrolled in the Video House (another program for students who are overage and eligible for Chapter I in reading and math Charter) compare most favorably to non-video Chapter I students, particularly with respect to percent passing math and science, and percent earning sufficient credits to move from 9th to 10th.

Our primary work over the past two years has been creating this school based capacity for radical transformation. Working primarily through the adults, we were surprised to find early, discernible improvements in student outcomes. We believe this to have occured because we work with teams of adults focussed on school and classroom based changes. Most reforms work with single teacher volunteers, pulled out of their schools, get "trained" and go back to what feel like hostile environments. For this reason, we have insisted on teacher teams so as to

accelerate the pace by which student outcomes could be affected.

**The Politics of Reform - Engaging Educators in Collective Change**

When we first entered the work of restructuring, a fair number of Philadelphia teachers had already been engaged with professional development networks within and beyond the city including the rich experiences with PATHS/PRISM (See Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992). The challenge, then, was to translate what had been rich individual faculty development projects into sustained, collective school based transformations toward improved student outcomes. This proved not to be such an easy shift. While some teachers remarked that they had felt alone within their schools, they were nevertheless energized by local and national professional networks and quite weary of trying to create school based change. They were well socialized to a centralized, hierarchical system; used to little freedom and no authority.

Early on, I naively thought that if only educators could be free to dream, individually and collectively, to imagine and ask for the conditions of labor and schooling they sought, then they would produce rich, educationally progressive notions of "what could be." But - in Philadelphia the shrinking pool of students meant that the last time a secondary English teacher or social studies teacher was hired was 1972. Teachers here have lived through installation of state mandated graduation credits, generation of centralized "initiatives" and piloted school-based projects; they have worked with these same colleagues (for 20+ years) under disempowering structures. Union-District relations had been deeply adversarial, although improved of recent. Budget cuts from State and city were imminent and the principals had voted to join the teamsters union during this administration.

So, at those early meetings, when asked to imagine "what could be", teachers sought more freedom from District prescriptions, they envisioned "fewer overage students" (Philadelphia had a promotion policy that resulted in 20 - 25% of 9th graders being substantially overaged), "more tracking" and "more special education placements." It was not that these teachers were ill-informed about the best of practice, nor harsh in their judgements about kids. They had the categories of experience that they had, and from these they generated images of what could be -- "more teachers and counselors."

So the work of reform was clear. Neither top/down nor naively bottom/up, the Collaborative worked with educators and parents, through ongoing critical conversations about practice, which came to be known as guided school based change. What we failed to anticipate, however, was the depth of "communitarian damage" that had infiltrated, divided and defined the culture of these schools. Even those principals and faculty who were still energized and enthusiastic could barely imagine working with their weary colleagues to create rich educational communities. Few could imagine that the District owuld allow them the room for radical change, and fewer could imagine a sufficiently collective effort among colleagues to produce improvements in student outcomes. The damage ran deep and wide. It took about two years to begin to melt it (Sarason, 1992). In many instances we are still slogging through power struggles. I consider it progress that at least now, people are fighting aloud.

We were committed to transform with, not despite and not around existing public schools. So radical vision meant slow, incremental changes in practice. With teachers and parents this work has been terrific. Each has a vested interest,

ultimately, in understanding the needs, strengths and passions of students. Most, when supported, are willing to stretch to get there. Indeed, it took a more than a short while to move out of "despair" and into a sense of possibility. But we knew that when Debbie Meier told us, "It's hard to fix a flat and drive a car at the same time."

Marshall Meyer's and Lynn Zucker book, Traditionally Failing Organizations (1989) told us more than we wanted to know about how typical urban schools and their districts "make sense" of chronic failure. When hierarchical and controlling organizations get used to producing failure, they generate ideologies and practices to justify and naturalize it (Fine, 1991). Try attending a typical urban high school graduation of 250-300 students, out of a school of 2500-3000, and ask why? Critical players generate defensive ideologies that explain, and justify failure. Disempowered practitioners will collectively resist the notion that success is within reach. As Roberto Unger (1990) has written:

> Sometimes we conduct ourselves as exiles from a world whose arrangements exclude no true insight and no worthwhile satisfaction. But more often we treat the plain, lusterless world in which we actually find ourselves, this world in which the limits of circumstance always remain preposterously disproportionate to the unlimited reach of striving, as if its structures of belief and action were here for keeps, as if it were the lost paradise where we could think all the thoughts and satisfy all the desires worth having. When we think and act in this way, we commit the sin the prophets call idolatry. As a basis for self-understanding, it is worse than sin. It is a mistake.

In organizations where failure has been normative, justifications about "those children," "poverty," "racism", "at riskness," or "those mothers" litter the scene, as does mistrust of educators, centrally and in the schools, blocking any creative

sense of possibility. While these ideologies have been interrupted at many school sites, they still pervade many bureaucratic policies and practices.

In this context, the rate of school based change has been astonishing. Three years into it, teachers are "back" in droves. Many principals are engaged. Parents are involved in unprecedented numbers (see Table 1). All eager but often frustrated, trying to work with each other, themselves, administrators, students and parents in relationships that have been historically impossible within the confines of bureaucracy, they are now connected to communities, and struggling for a minimum of stability and security requisite to building strong communities. They suffer their problems, though, in charters, in schools and with the district.

**Dilemmas of Reform**

Across three years, the development and impact of Charters has been much more encouraging than we anticipated over such a short period of time. Charters are up in numbers, transforming how teachers, students and parents feel about the work of schooling, and they are reflecting, already, what seem to be modest increments in students' persistence in school, attendance, course passage and promotion rates. But we are entering the next generation of dilemmas, struggles, fights and indeed battles over how to invent a district committed to serious, effective, caring and intellectually rich education within the inner city.

Some of our dilemmas derive almost "naturally" from the commitment to transforming "what has been" into "what could be," rather than peeling off motivated students and parents into voucher schmes, new or alternative schools, or magnets. Many are fundamental dilemmas of organizational transformation in the

public sphere. Dilemmas of bureaucracy emerge because educators and parents are now interrupting a dehumanizing discourse of rationality and efficiency with a percolating vision of educational democracies and a press for improved student outcomes. Quite a few are the dilemmas of working in the urban public sector in the 1990s, inheriting and combatting a Reagan/Bush legacy which has nationally constrained the lives and dreams of low income, African American and Latino youngsters, and their families. Below we review these dilemmas within charters, schools and the Central District.

**Dilemma One**: Doing "What Is" As We Envision What "Could Be"

In the midst of restructuring we live inside a moment of institutional schizophrenia. A micro-example of a macro-problem, teachers are caught between a radically new world, and the relatively untransformed bureaucracies that stand, around them and in their heads, rigid and controlling.

To illustrate: Two talented (math and English) teachers of a charter have been collecting portfolios from students, tracking "artifacts" of student knowledge, and working closely with social workers on students' emotional needs. Their students are overage ninth graders - an academically discouraged group come alive! When it came time for mid term grades, the teachers worried together and aloud. They decided that while compared to themselves in the beginning of the year, these students, overage ninth graders, had worked incredibly hard. But they couldn't, in good conscience, give them As (for the most part) or Fs. So they settled on Cs. The group went into outrage, felt betrayed, morale and attendance dropped precipitously. Simply put, as one teacher reflected, "Giving Cs knocked a hole in the program."

Having to live with the traditions of assessment in the midst of radical

restructuring raises tremendous dilemmas. Oxley reiterates this dilemma of transforming, reflecting and working all at once. She writes:

> Our study points out starkly the difficulties inherent in establishing house systems within a traditional school setting. The student-centered house systems cannot coexist with traditional, subject-centered schooling. Features of the latter which pose serious barriers to a house system include a curriculum that is broken up into multiple academic tracks and programs, and academic department structure which, alone, drives curriculum development and staff supervision, and a specialized system of student support that directs different staff to focus on different aspects of student functioning. (Oxley, 1991, p. ___)

The work of [charter] restructuring within existing [school] contexts is markedly different from creating new schools, alternative schools, or privatization with eager, "willing" volunteers. Each is differently exhausting and invigorating. However, creating rich educational settings within existing bureaucracies, educators and parents must juggle the contradictions and invent educational possibilities in the midst of enormous educational constraints and hierarchical resistance. Trying to grow a series of educational communities from amidst the crusty, fragmented organizations we have called urban high schools, requires that parents and educators who are front runners do double duty -- create "what could be" and transform "what has been" in their schools, and centrally. In the process, they offend almost every vested interest, at some point. Formerly taboo questions arise about the role of Central District, the need for school basing of resources and decisions, the necessity for assistant principals, the "school wide" function of counselors, the standard practice of "bumping teachers," the right of teachers to interview and hire their colleagues. . . The political reverbations are enormous.

**Dilemma Two**: Autonomy vs. Community

When we undertook restructuring, we were simply naive about the realities of life inside secondary urban schools. We didn't realize that one of the only perks left in the "comps" was autonomy - getting to shut one's door. We also didn't realize that few reforms in the past have asked educators to transform their individual and collective practices, as well as systemic policies and practices, in ways that would improve student outcomes. So we didn't know that among educators left in the comprehensive high schools, few would initially believe that full-blown institutional, collective change would be possible. Now, an ongoing struggle for faculty and students is how to create charters as rich communities which respect both collective work and autonomy. The tension is real -- even though one teacher articulately explained that "collective work" addresses needs that "autonomy" cannot:

> We're trying to give students a handle on having some power in designing their futures. Many kids are extreme fatalists. Questions we keep getting are "Why should I do this? I might not be around next week." We let them play out these nightmare versions of next week in their own neighborhoods. Those are the real blockers to grabbing on to a lesson in school.
>
> They don't see that they have a choice. They don't see the supports available. We support them.
>
> These students are older. They're not into sharing problems. They see themselves as the answers to their problems. They see themselves as the main power source. Within that parameter their options are very limited. My job: to open windows.
>
> The charter system, with a core group of teachers working with a smaller group of kids, supports the notion that "There are five people on the team that I can go to for help." Charter structure supports the notion and lesson for kids that there are

> many supports out there. It's definitely a structure that works.
> [Shirley Farmer, Kensington]

By now, much of Charter work actually begins to address what seemed to be contradictory needs of educators - for autonomy and community. We have come to see these needs are necessarily co-existent. That struggle persists.

**Dilemma Three**: We Can Only Educate. We Can't Deal with Their Personal Needs Too!

Early on, this line was common among the educators with whom we worked. No longer. Working within charters has opened up the "personal" lives of students, and of faculty. And there is no going back. It took time for us all to realize that there are good reasons that faculty get "burned out" or "callous" to students' lives. Educators, today, are picking up the pieces of a society ravaged by class and race stratification, and they are being held accountable for turning students who carry the weight of the bottom of the social hierarchy, into compliant, loyal, educated and optimistic citizens. In particular, high school educators inherit histories of academic defeat which they need to reverse. In this process, many educators, although certainly not all, have opted <u>not</u> to know the pains and struggles experienced by their students. "If I knew," said one very committed teacher, "what would I do?"

And yet, Charter based education takes us deeply into the lives, strengths and survival strategies of urban adolescents.

**Scene from the Motivation Charter at Palace High School:**

> We are sitting around, four of us, including Charles, a senior, Sara, a senior, Twanya, a junior and Myron, a 9th grader,

and myself.

**Sara** (senior): On my block, I'm the only one still going to school. It's bad for them. One boy was so smart, but he had family problems. His mom kicked him out, and he saw money was in the drugs. But they respect me. That is, for going to school. They see I'm still trying. Not sitting and talking on the stoop.

**Myron** (9th grader): Not me. I get put down for being smart. You are a nerd. Makes you feel stupid. They hate your guts for being smart. I think about transferring. I try talking about it. They're heading for trouble, but I feel bad all the time. If it weren't for my parents I would leave school. Sometimes I put myself down for it, not saying nothin back. I think they will get revenge, but I think I should say something back. They can joke around with friends, but other set to fight. I explode.

**Twanya** (junior): I look around my community and think I don't want to be here. The only way out is education. I come here, and turn on my alarm clock. And in Motivation, we have our own values. In our room, it's a big thing to have high grades and be on honor role.

**Sara**: If it wasn't for motivation, I wouldn't visit half of the colleges I have been to. Opportunity to be somebody.

**Charles** (Senior): I don't know if I would have made it period. In this charter, it's a big difference to be together, in our classes, doing all this work. Visiting cultural events I never would have been to, trips to colleges, plays.

**Sara**: Kids in our classes are good friends. In ninth grade I was quietist. Now I be friends and really accepted. When I was younger cause in a different school, I didn't show my feelings. Then I did show my feelings. Most people found that weird. But they accepted me, now, when I thought they wouldn't. This school inside a school is the only socializing I do. I know my teachers.

**Charles**: Look, as for me, nothing positive is motivating me. Not a positive thing. I'm in charge of 10 brothers and sisters, and everything around me is negative. Negative things in community, and I don't want to fall into that. I had to help my aunt who needed my support. So, school is the only way. And here, like if I have a problem with teachers, I can talk to other teachers. I work with the same teachers over time, know what to expect from them, and I guess, them from me. If I don't understand the work, I operate my mouth. He (teacher) knows me for years and says stay after school. No charge. I'm make

some time.

This dilemma, as it turns out, is also an opportunity. The emotional social and psychological issues of young adolescents now litter our schools, masked as attendance problems, acting out, discipline, or even learning problems. We now know, in charters, that the problems of "at risk youth" can often be unraveled to reflect homelessness, family or community violence, learning difficulties, or cultural differences, the kinds of issues public education has ostensibly stayed away from. But we now know that young people import these issues into our schools. As one teacher noted:

> The students somehow understand that the bonus here is that we're not reverting to the old traditional "kick out" system. You can still work out problems here. Here you have the opportunity to get ready. We're not going to abandon them.

The dilemma for those of us committed to reform is to figure out how to support educators who are willing, but understandably reluctant and ill equipped to "take on" the lives of these youngsters. Teacher Emily Style paraphrased Mary Daly:

> Then, with the rise of [Charters] some [teachers & students] found each other, came to know each other in new ways. That was the beginning of our rough Voyage, which has proved -- for those who have persisted -- strange, difficult, unpredictable, terrifying, enraging, energizing, transforming, encouraging. For those who have persisted there is at least one certainty and perhaps only one: Once we have understood this much, there is no turning back. (Daly, 368)

This dilemma asks how we can create Charters as safe places to discuss, even be educated through social issues that feel like embarrassing "personal problems," so

that students don't have to feel alone with the difficulties of living that so many have survived so well.

**Dilemma Four**: Bottom Up Images, Multicultural Curriculum and Heterogeneous Groupings

At the Collaborative we were committed to restructuring being a "bottom up" design (that is, working for ideas and strategies generated primarily by educators and parents). We were also committed, however, to what was known to be the "best of practice." So we pressed for multi-cultural education, mainstreaming of students labeled in need of special education, the heterogeneous groupings of students (Oakes, 1992), and teachers/parents' substantial role in decision making. We didn't realize was that these two commitments are not necessarily compatible within the institutions of urban public education today. For instance - given the research on the educational problems which derive from deep and rigid segregation and tracking, we knew that Charters should be "mixed ability." Yet we heard, early on, from many educators and parents raised and practiced in the comforts of tracking, that this would be impossible, or educationally irresponsible. Indeed most schools exempted ninth grade "repeaters" from their first year of restructuring, and many, initially worked "around" special education.

So in Philadelphia we continue to struggle with how to get more educators and parents to imagine the virtues of heterogeneity, when indeed it looks, feels and may indeed be more work for them, and less attention for their children. This is particularly tricky for principals of some schools that have become "last resort"

who want an elite track to attract "good" kids, educators who have accrued enough seniority to placed out of lower track teaching, for educators working within special education, or for parents of "advanced track" students. Further, we wrestle with how to get federal and state regulations sufficiently pried open (e.g. Chapter I, special education, Perkins monies, drop out prevention) so as to enable, and not constrain, the mixed ability groupings of students. We have begun to move toward school-wide use of Chapter I monies, integration of special education students and faculty, and school basing of Perkins. But these shifts are slow, hard and politically treacherous territory. Finally, we debate how to get us all to shift consciousness so as to recognize that students are not born into a track, but indeed, develop over time into their own forms of intelligence?

Perhaps the best illustration of such thinking is embodied in one anecdote reported by a teacher working within a heterogeneous Charter. Ann reports:

> My colleagues, especially those who aren't yet in a Charter, say, sure your charter is doing well and has good student statistics, but you got all the middle class kids in the school! Now, Michelle, you know there are no middle class kids in this school (indeed, this is one of the poorest schools in the city.) But because of the work we do with the students, they start to look and act middle class (whatever that means) and then people accuse us of creaming! Now we have to haul out their eighth grade records to demonstrate that these students were just like the other students -- until they entered this charter, at least!

Being educated is a process, not a given. This is only slowly sinking in as an insight for us all.

**Dilemma Five**: Efficiency and Efficacy

This dilemma is, perhaps, the most powerful. Today, in the 1990s, it is no longer a mystery how to educate, and even educate well, low achieving, low income urban students. Those smothered in the perverse box called "at risk." Collectively we have the knowledge, methods, assessment strategies to transform our classrooms into engaging, critical and creative sites of intellectual growth, and personal development. What is a mystery in the 1990s is whether or not we have the political will to enable urban public schools, serving low income students of color, to flourish.

If we are serious about creating intellectually engaging and personally supportive communities of adults and students, we must work to insure that intellectual depth, continuity, care, community and trust are nourished inside those public high schools which have been deprived of such a history. It is important to realize, from our experience in Philadelphia, that restructured schools are probably not more expensive than traditional, failing schools, although resources need to be deployed in radically different ways; the Central District bureaucracy needs to be trimmed enormously; fragmentation of "innovation" must come to a halt, and state monies for larger graduating classes (instead of dropouts) must be forthcoming. But, we also realize that it does take substantial investment to get from "here" to "there." The question that we are now facing asks, is institutionalization of reform an oxymoron? Can the radical transformation of schools, into autonomous communities, survive within the public sphere? Can we collectively and seriously reinvent the public sphere of public education to be a contested site of what Ann Swidler would call the Good Society, in which the "vested" but also shared interests of educators, students and parents can engage together in a sense of

community (1991)? Or, will the Right, the abuses of capitalism and racism, the press to privatize and/or the perversions of bureaucracy cripple what we know to be so possible?

**Looking Back/Moving Forward**

Eight million dollars and three years later, five major policy conclusions can be drawn from the evaluation of the first phase of the Collaborative:

- We can make a difference in existing, urban comprehensive high schools, with existing faculties, "at risk" students and their families. School-based restructuring, as a relentlessly supported strategic agenda focussing on transformed governance, instruction, structure, assessment and student supports, appears to be associated with improved student outcomes even in one of the most poverty-ridden school districts in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

- External investment can enhance student outcomes--especially monies targeted to instigate systemic change. Schools that enjoyed "High external investment" from the Collaborative, earmarked to enhance schools' institutional capacity to educate, did report substantially greater increases in student outcomes, than "low investment" school. It takes investment--in the near term--to instigate the change process; to enhance institutional capacity; and to sustain ongoing organizational self-reflection toward improved student outcomes.

- Participatory and strategically guided decisionmaking can promote contexts for improved student outcomes. Shared decisionmaking schools pursuing full school restructuring have advanced further, in terms of improved student outcomes, than schools which have deferred shared decisionmaking. We presume that a school's engaging shared decision making/school based management reflects a full school commitment to invest in educational restructuring. Thus, it would make sense, that student outcomes would improve in those contexts in which investment is most comprehensive.

- Those schools most "at risk" are, indeed, most susceptible to early improvements. Schools which reported the most troubling student data in 1988/89 appear to have progressed more rapidly than "high start" schools. Such improvement was especially apparent when there was evidence of high external, and deep school-based, investment.

- Learning communities which are educationally rich and intimate will enhance student learning, teacher collaboration and parental involvement. Placing students and teachers within learning communities, or charters, appears to yield increases in attendance, course passage, promotion and, we believe, "holding power" particularly for those students considered most "at risk." Risk is a contextually created - and removable -feature of academic life.

These conclusions have informed the strategies of restructuring pursued over the past three, and will shape our future three years.

Now, within our high schools, charters are relatively radical communities of teachers, parents and students who believe (to quite varying degrees) that they should have substantial decision making authority, and should be the site for distribution resources and flexible use of resources. Some even claim that they should be responsible - even "accountable" - for student progress if the two prior conditions are met. At minimum they want to be stable (not have teachers yanked out in September or October of the year, and returned in the Spring) and autonomous (they want direct access to resources, and they want to determine how to use planning time, instructional review days, evenings, summers and construct student post secondary biographies). Not very radical demands for a community of educators and parents.

Charters irritate, however, because they represent fundamental interruption of the rationalistic public sector bureaucracy as we have known it. In this way they share the critique of bureaucracy voiced by voucher advocates. Their discourse of community, relationality and autonomy flies in the face of traditions of bureaucracy. These teachers don't want to be told how, when and why to act. They do want, and deserve, resources that now sit centrally under layers and layers

of supervision. They do seek connections with, and input from, other secondary faculties, universities, parents, corporate and community based organizations. And yet different from voucher advocates, they want to remain public, accessible to all children and democratic.

So we are left asking, Can reform be sustained? Not because it is a mystery, any longer, to figure out how to educate "at risk" youths. Not because it is hard to engage educational communities of educators, students and parents. Deceptive ideologies that once justified broken institutions -- "Poor kids who can't/won't learn," "burnout teachers" and "apathetic parents" -- have been exposed for their cynicism. They obscure societal and schools' responsibility for past failures. More fundamentally, they bury what we know to be more than possible -success even for "at risk" kids.

We ask if reform can be sustained because the jury is out on political will -- nationally, at the state level, and within local public school bureaucracies. As Asa Hilliard has argued:

> The risk for our children in school is not a risk associated with their intelligence. Public school failures have nothing to do with IQ, little to do with poverty, race, language, style, and nothing to do with children's families. All of these are red herrings. When researchers study them, we may ultimately yield to some greater insight into the instructional process. But at present these issues, as explanations of school failure, distract attention away from the fundamental problem facing us today. We have one primary problem: Do we truly will to see each and every child in this nation develop to the peak of his or her capacities?

If this round of reform fails, in Philadelphia, Chicago, or elsewhere, the New Right

press for privatization will prevail. A deepened underclass will be abandoned. Many of us will know that public sector bureaucracies may have publicly resisted but implicitly buoyed the privatization agenda in their refusal to change, radically, to meet the needs of kids. It is neither too expensive, nor too late, to transform the educational outcomes of urban adolescents. Even those we have collectively placed "at risk".

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**TABLE 1**
**Percentage of Students Passing Major Subjects**
**- All 22 Comprehensive High Schools**

| Year | English | History | Math | Science |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1988-89 | | | | |
| Grade: 9 | 54.2 | 56.4 | 50.3 | 55.4 |
| 10 | 61.2 | 60.0 | 57.6 | 63.2 |
| 11 | 73.6 | 74.3 | 66.2 | 71.7 |
| 12 | 86.4 | 88.4 | 82.7 | 86.7 |
| 1989-90 | | | | |
| Grade: 9 | 58.5 | 59.3 | 51.9 | 57.9 |
| 10 | 69.3 | 65.8 | 64.2 | 68.9 |
| 11 | 76.2 | 76.1 | 69.4 | 73.5 |
| 12 | 89.9 | 89.6 | 85.8 | 88.0 |
| 1990-91 | | | | |
| Grade: 9 | 60.5 | 63.8 | 55.6 | 60.6 |
| 10 | 74.1 | 70.3 | 66.9 | 71.7 |
| 11 | 79.4 | 81.0 | 73.3 | 78.7 |
| 12 | 90.3 | 90.9 | 87.2 | 88.5 |
| Difference 1990-91 1988-89 | | | | |
| Grade: 9 | + 6.3 | + 7.4 | + 5.3 | + 5.2 |
| 10 | +12.9 | +10.3 | + 9.3 | + 8.5 |
| 11 | + 5.8 | + 6.7 | + 7.1 | + 7.0 |
| 12 | + 3.9 | + 2.5 | +4 .5 | + 1.8 |

**TABLE 2**
**Analysis of Change in Key Indicators: 1988/89 - 1990/91**
**Comprehensive High School Ninth Grade Students Only**

| | Change in Average Daily Attendance: 1989/90 to 1990/91 | Change in Percent Passing Major Subjects 1988/89 to 1990/91 | | | | Change in Percent Earning 4 or More Credits: 1988/89 to 1990/91 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | English | Social Studies | Math | Science | | |
| Part A - By Level of Investment | | | | | | | |
| High Investment | -0.86 | 8.57 | 9.25 | 8.93 | 4.98 | 2.05 | |
| Low Investment | -0.62 | 4.61 | 6.59 | 3.41 | 4.99 | 0.49 | |
| Part B - By Shared Decisionmaking (School-Based Management) | | | | | | | |
| Shared Decision-Making | -0.43 | | 7.75 | 8.08 | 8.29 | 6.53 | 1.88 |
| Non-Shared Decision Making | -0.62 | | 3.43 | 6.65 | 1.12 | 3.38 | 0.03 |
| Part C - By Initial Starting Point | | | | | | | |
| Low Starting Point | -0.13 | | 10.58 | 10.05 | 4.02 | 7.28 | 2.80 |
| Medium Starting Point | -1.39 | | 5.98 | 10.77 | 6.64 | 7.17 | 2.14 |
| High Starting Point | 0.56 | | 2.64 | 0.36 | 4.29 | 0.49 | -0.99 |

Note: Results from individual schools have been weighted to adjust differences in school size within subcategories. As a result, the range of values reported within subcategories may not include the overall unweighted means calculated for all ninth graders in comprehensive high schools.

DEFINITION OF VARIABLES:

Level of Investment is a rough indicator of activity and resources allocated to schools by the Collaborative to foster restructuring. Six schools were identified as high investment schools for the three year period.

Shared Decisionmaking/School-Based Management: 12 schools that entered the shared decisionmaking/school-based management process during 1990/91 year.

Initial Starting Point: Three tiers based on the percentage of all students earning four or more credits in ninth grade during the 1988/89 (baseline) school year. Low: fewer than 40 percent; medium: between 40 and 60 percent; and high: more than 60 percent.

Change in Average Daily Attendance: The baseline year is the 1989/90 school year. Average Daily Attendance is calculated by dividing the total number of days of attendance by the total number of days that students were scheduled to attend. Change values are reflected in percentage points.

Change in Percent Passing Major Subjects: The baseline year is the 1988/89 school year. Percent passing reflects the number of students receiving a passing grade in each course in the major area divided by the total number of report marks assigned to students in that course. Some students may enroll in and receive marks in more than one course within a single major subject area. For example, Chapter 1 reading marks are reflected in English totals. Students who have exited the school or have attended infrequently do not receive report cards. Their performance is not reflected in the percent of students receiving passing marks in major

Table 1
School District of Philadelphia/Philadelphia Schools Collaborative
Philadelphia Comprehensive High School
Three Years of Reform

| Elements | PSC Findings 1988-1991 |
|---|---|
| 1. Governance: Communication & Decision-making | _ The substantial involvement of all 22 schools in restructuring efforts for the 9th grade transition year, and the expansion of the efforts of most over the 3 year period.<br>_ 16 of 22 comprehensive high schools have submitted Letters of Intent for shared decision making/school-based management in order to facilitate and implement restructuring efforts. |
| 2. Curriculum & Instruction | _ Formulation of District guidelines for charter recognition and support and increase in the number of Charters (schools-within-a-school) from fewer than 30 in 1988 to 81 in 1991.<br>_ An increase in the number and percentage of students expected to be served in these charters from an estimated 4,600 in the 1988/1989 school year to a projected total of more than 14,000 by the 1992/93 school year. |
| 3. Curriculum Work | _ The participation of more than 600 teachers in each of two years of professional development institutes with other staff, administrators and parents.<br>_ The beginnings of university partnerships in many schools and charters toward a wide variety of changes in instructional styles, curricular content and organization, and performance based assessment strategies for ensuring student progress.<br>_ With Temple University, introduction of a model for clinically based teacher preparation for new teachers. |

| Elements | PSC Findings 1988-1991 |
|---|---|
| 4. Student and Family Supports | _ A demonstrable change in approach within all 22 comprehensive high schools in orientation, support and integration of services provided to ninth grade students.<br>_ With an active core of 40 governance council parents, there has been a substantial increase in the active participation of parents in restructuring through their roles on governance councils, charter participation and through other sponsored activities. |

- With University of Pennsylvania, introduction of university model for providing social service/social work interns into 4 schools as of 1991 to support students, families, and faculty.

5. Evaluation/Assessment

- Improvement in student outcomes is reported for attendance, course passage, and promotion rates particularly in school based management schools.
- Beginning Winter 1991, twelve charters will serve as Performance Based Assessment Pilots. Over three years, in collaboration with corporate and university representatives, researchers and dicipline-based consultants these charters will generate a system of graduation projects which are classroom based, District reviewed (samples) and which satisfy Pennsylvania state regulations.
- With the Office of Accountability and Assessment, the Collaborative is supporting a consulting relationship with Dr. George Madaus,of Boston College to track student progress.

6. Partnerships

- The attraction of multiple direct grants and other resources to support the middle-high school transition for students served by comprehensive high schools.
- College Access Centers providing school and community service have been established in three regions of the City with plans for expansion citywide.
- The Philadelphia Scholars Fund has been established with a goal of raising $15 million endowment for "last dollar" scholarship support for needy Philadelphia college-bound graduates.
- The Education for Employment initiative has been formulated to include restructuring of vocational education to support school based technical charters, expansion of Academies, and corporate job comitments for qualified graduates.

Dec-91

SAMPLES OF CHARTER DATA

| School E - 9th Graders | | | 1990-1991 Aver. Daily Att. | % pass: E. | H. | M. | S. | % ≥ 4 credits |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 26 overage (3 repeating) | N=546 students in charters | | 88.1 - 86.2 | 78 | 71 | 72 | 80 | 77% |
| 106 overage (163 repeating) | N=261 students not in charters | | 64.1 - 60.4 | 54 | 41 | 47 | 50 | 30% |
| **School F - 9th Graders** | | | **1990-1991 Aver. Daily Att.** | **% pass: E.** | **H.** | **M.** | **S.** | **% ≥ 4 credits** |
| 84 overage | N=485 students in charter | | 78.6 - 82.1 | 64 | 62 | 62 | 69 | 59% |
| 2 overage | N=71 Copernican on age | | 75.5 - 81.9 | 65 | 66 | 74 | 68 | 69% |
| 35 overage | N=74 Copernican overage | | 59.1 - 69.7 | 43 | 42 | 60 | 48 | 47% |
| 111 overage | N=698 new 9th students not in charter | | 75.5 - 78.5 | 57 | 58 | 55 | 59 | 48% |
| 327 overage | all 9th not in charters | | 64.8 - 71.1 | 43 | 43 | 40 | 40 | 41% |
| **School G - 9th Graders** | | | **1990-1991 Aver. Daily Att.** | **% pass: E.** | **H.** | **M.** | **S.** | **% ≥ 4 credits** |
| 70 overage | N=262 students in charters | | 90.0 - 93.1 | 71 | 82 | 72 | 76 | 77.1% |
| 91 overage | N=413 not in charters | | 75.9 - 82.4 | 51 | 54 | 58 | 50 | 44.0% |
| 2 overage | N=119 students in lab | | 89.0 - 91.8 | 73 | 81 | 59 | 78 | 75.0% |
| **School D - 9th Graders** | | **Receive report card** | **1990-1991 Aver. Daily Att.** | **% pass: E.** | **H.** | **M.** | **S.** | **% ≥ 4 credits** |
| 29% overage | N=1255 all 9th grade | 71. | 65.8 - 61.9 | 59 | 71 | 57 | 65 | 44.9% |
| 15% overage | N=335 in transitions | 89. | 75.4 - 71.3 | 61 | 76 | 67 | 67 | 61.2% |
| 34% overage | N=920 not in transition | 62. | 61.9 - 58.0 | 62 | 78 | 53 | 64 | 39.0% |
| 23% overage | N=86 video | 82 | 70.7 - 62.5 | 54 | 65 | 63 | 61 | 48.8% |
| 18% overage | N=92 Ch I - not video | 84 | 71.5 - 66.9 | 55 | 65 | 42 | 57 | 43.5% |
| **School B - 10th Graders** | | | **1990-1991 Aver. Daily Att.** | **% pass: E.** | **H.** | **M.** | **S.** | **% ≥ 4 credits** |
| 15 overage | N=187 students in charters | | 78.6 - 74.9 | 69 | 68 | 53 | 59 | 60.4% |
| 114 overage | N=332 students not in charters | | 66.4 - 67.6 | 48 | 59 | 48 | 56 | 36.7% |
| 6 overage | N=115 students in Crossroads | | 80.5 - 76.2 | 68 | 71 | 60 | 53 | 62.0% |